If Voltaire Had Been a Czech...
By Richard A. Shweder

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Whatever isn't science, Miroslav Holub believes, isn't worth bothering with.

Zen, yoga, animal rights advocates, alternative medicine, Hindu gods, J. R. R. Tolkien, postgraduate mystics, California philosophers and anyone or anything either pre-modern or post-modern.

In “The Death of Butterflies,” Holub reminisces about his pet, when the “natural scientist” and “the lover of angel wings” within himself were still fused. Twenty years later, “Blake grew up,” he tells us. Now only Darwin remains.

It is tempting to read Holub as though he is trying to be Lewis Thomas, Buckminster Fuller, Jacob Bronowski (and perhaps a bit of James Thurber) rolled into one. In “No,” he extols the Caesarean section as a heroic act of resistance to politically correct natural childbirth, which he associates with things pinko and greenie. In “Apes, in Particular,” he writes that the indignation of animal rights advocates about cages “becomes dubious compared to the plight of children shut up in apartments with psychopathic parents, incestuous or sadistic fathers, alcoholic mothers, or bigoted families who punish disobedience with blows and treatment of leukemia with prayer.”

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The spirit that haunts the essays that make up “Shedding Life” is the ghost of the Enlightenment, a wrath of reason deriding all Dark Age flights of fancy. Miroslav Holub, a Czech polymath with degrees in medicine and the humanities, is convinced that the world woke up and became good 300 years ago in Western Europe. Science, above and against all else is his message — above and against Marxism, parapsychology.

Richard A. Shweder, a cultural anthropologist, is chairman of the University of Chicago’s Committee on Human Development and editor of the forthcoming book “Welcome to Middle Age! (And Other Cultural Fictions).”

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